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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR YATES AND GSE TALK ON EASTERN
FRONT/GNU NEGOTIATIONS

CLASSIFIED BY: AMB Scott H. DeLisi, for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Following the conclusion of preparatory talks between the Eastern Front and Government of National Unity (GNU), Ambassador John Yates had the opportunity to sit down with the Eritrean mediator, PFDJ Political Advisor Yemane Ghebreab, to discuss the just-concluded preliminary round of negotiations, the agreements signed, and what to expect from the next round of negotiations. Ghebreab explained that the talks had gone well, most issues were resolved, and those that had not been would be addressed by the time the next round began July 17. He also explained that the issue of observers was still unclear. It seemed likely that there would not/not be a "formal" role for observers, but that international partners would be welcome back for the next round in an informal capacity. Yemane added that the GSE welcomed USG involvement and that Ambassador Yates should feel free to return and be present when the talks resume July 17. End Summary.

OUTCOME OF PRE-TALKS

¶2. (C) PFDJ Political Advisor and mediator for the Eastern Front/GNU negotiations, Yemane Ghebreab, began his discussion with Ambassador John Yates (representing AF/SPG) by explaining that overall the preparatory talks went very well and there were no major obstacles. However, he noted, the talks did not delve into any of the substantive issues. He did acknowledge that there had been some concern at the conclusion of the first round of talks that the parties may not sign the Declaration of Principles (DOP) and Cessation of Hostilities agreements. It seems that the GNU had two specific sticking points on the DOP and the Eastern Front would be unwilling to sign the Cessation of Hostilities agreement unless the DOP was also signed. Ghebreab explained that the GNU had not liked the inclusion of language on marginalization, and had wanted to link the negotiations more explicitly to the interim constitution especially on issues such as wealth sharing. Neither the mediator nor the Eastern Front backed down from the working draft, however, and the

GNU finally agreed. (Note: Both documents have been sent to AF/FO, AF/SPG and AF/RSA. End Note).

13. (C) Ghebreab said that the "second round" of negotiations would begin on July 17. This round would last approximately one month and then there would be another break of approximately one month before a "third round" and, according to Ghebreab, final round, began. Ghebreab explained that like other negotiations in Sudan, there would be three main issues to be discussed in the negotiations, Wealth Sharing, Power Sharing and Security Arrangements. However, unlike the negotiations in Abuja and Naivasha, the issue of security would not be the overriding issue and instead social and economic issues related to Wealth Sharing would probably take precedence and hence why these negotiations could be resolved more quickly and more easily.

ROLE OF OBSERVERS

14. (C) When asked about the role of observers, Ghebreab admitted that this had probably been the most contentious issue between the two parties. He explained that the GNU did not want any observers and that the Eastern Front wanted as many as possible. The GSE, he commented, fell somewhere in the middle. While both groups diverged considerably on the issue, in the end they both decided to leave it up to the mediator. Ghebreab explained the GSE's current thinking on observers is to not have formal observers, but instead have observers involved in an informal capacity and possibly in expert or advisor roles.

15. (C) Ghebreab claims that while the GNU's position on observers is "not now", they did agree to three points on the issue put forth by the GSE: 1) the GSE is allowed to have friends and partners that they consult with during the negotiations, 2) that if during the negotiations the GSE or other parties believe the issue of formal observers needs to be revisited, the GSE is allowed to halt negotiations and discuss with the parties, and 3) if/when the parties reach an agreement, witnesses will be asked to attend the signing of the agreement. The GNU accepted these three points, and just asked to be consulted if the GSE believes a formal observer role is necessary.

IS THE EASTERN FRONT READY?

16. (C) One of the major concerns leading up to the preparatory talks and during them was the issue of Eastern Front readiness and unity. Ghebreab explained that despite the rumors over the past few months regarding splits in the Eastern Front, the group made up mostly of Beja and Rashaida were surprisingly united throughout the initial talks. He agreed that most members of the Eastern Front still needed some assistance on negotiations, but believed that Dr. Amna Dirar's capabilities as well as the plan to bring in more outside experts should strengthen and bolster the group considerably. Ghebreab also stated that during the break before July 17, the Eastern Front was planning a conference to bring in representatives from different areas and groups of eastern Sudan and gain support for negotiations and ensure the greatest amount of representation in the Eastern Front. Ghebreab was not sure when or where this conference would take place, but stated that given GNU and GSE support for the conference it may happen in eastern Sudan or in Eritrea.

17. (C) Following this meeting, other sources suggested that the conference has already been scheduled for the week of July 3 and will probably take place in Tesseney, Eritrea. (Note: a town very close to the Sudan border. End Note) The conference will closely model the Eastern Front meetings that took place this past February/March between Rubda and Hamesh Koreib. These meetings drew a large number of Beja and Rashaida from outside Sudan as well as other groups in eastern Sudan. Similarly, EmbOffs were informed that the Eastern Front is organizing a capacity building workshop beginning the week of July 10 in Asmara. It is not clear who will be running the workshop. We have been told, however, that the Norwegians and the Dutch may both be willing to play roles in helping to support these events.

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE

18. (C) As the meeting drew to a close, Ghebreab reiterated a call for assistance from the international community. He explained that between now and July 17, the GSE would welcome advice, suggestions and technical expertise on what a final agreement should look like between the Eastern Front and GNU. The GSE would like to be able to call on experts for technical issues and have already asked the Norwegians and UNMIS for their assistance and expertise. He continued that while the US and GSE have their differences on other policy matters, they are of the same mind on Sudan and want the same thing: a peaceful and stable Sudan. He invited Ambassador Yates or other USG officials back for the July 17 talks and again asked for any assistance we might provide on these negotiations.

COMMENT

19. (C) Overall the preparatory talks appear to have been a relative success. The GSE's ability to get both parties to agree to a DOP and a cessation of hostilities bodes well for its role in the next round, and the cessation of hostilities agreement in particular was especially timely given the recent SPLM withdrawal from the Hamesh Koreb area. However, as noted by Ghebreab, the Eastern Front will still need assistance getting up to par with the GNU delegation when it comes to negotiation skills. While they have a few strong individuals they will need to bring in outside experts to deal with the myriad of details that they will face once they start delving into the substantive issues next month. Hopefully the Eastern Front conference, as well as capacity building workshop, will provide them the broader representation, negotiating skills and confidence they need without sucking the momentum out of the upcoming "second round." Although there will not be an formal observer role initially, post believes that the USG should consider providing a technical expert or representative in the capacity of Ambassador John Yates or other USG official. End Comment.

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